

## The Incomparable Sassanids.



Shapur II (Shahpbur) using the Parthian shot whilst hunting lions. The Parthian shot was a strategy where cavalry, during war, pretended retreat and then turned around (but with feet firmly in the stirrups) to shoot arrows at the surprised enemy!!

The Sassanian Empire,(226A.D.-651 A.D.), the third Iranian empire, after the more famous Achaemenid Empire, founded by Cyrus the Great, and the second, the Parthian Empire which was founded by an Iranian people from north-east Iran; the Sassanian Empire was founded by Ardashir I in 226 A.D. starting in the province of Fars/Pars (where Persepolis is located.)

Ardashir (226A.D.-241), was a descendant of a line of Zoroastrian priests of Anahita, in Istakhr, Persis (Pars), who at the beginning of the third century had acquired the governorship of Persis. His father Papag (also pronounced Papak and Babak), was originally the ruler of a small town called Kheir. The eponymous founder of the line was Ardashir I's paternal grandfather, Sassan, the great priest of this Temple of Anahita.

After establishing his rule over Persis, Ardashir I rapidly extended his territory, demanding fealty from the local princes of Fars, and gaining control over the neighboring provinces of Kerman, Isfahan, Susiana, and Mesene.

This expansion quickly came to the attention of Artabanus IV(Ardvan) (216â€“224), of Parthia, Ardashir I's overlord. Artabanus IV initially ordered the governor of Khuzestan to march against Ardashir in 224, but this ended up in a major victory for Ardashir. Artabanus himself marched, the second time, against Ardashir I in 224. Their armies clashed, in Central Iran, where Artabanus IV was killed.

Ardashir I went on to invade the western provinces of the now defunct Parthian (Arsacid) Empire. Crowned in 226 at Ctesiphon as the sole ruler of Persia, he took the title Shahanshah, or 'King of Kings.' bringing the 400-year-old Parthian Empire to an end, and beginning four centuries of Sassanid rule.

Ardashir further expanded his new empire to the east and northwest, conquering more provinces of Iran, and Margiana (in modern Turkmenistan), Balkh,(north Afghanistan). He also added Bahrain and Mosul to Sassanid possessions. Later Sasanid inscriptions also claim the submission of the Kings of Kushan(West India), Turan(North of Iran) ,to Ardashir, although based on numismatic evidence, it is more likely that these actually submitted to Ardashir's son, the future Shapur I. In the west, assaults against Hatra, Armenia, and Adiabene met with less success. In 230 he raided deep

into Roman territory, and a Roman counter-offensive two years later ended inconclusively.

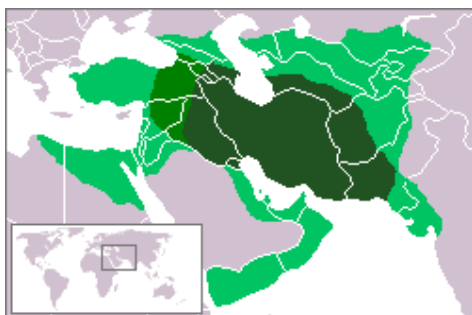
Ardashir I's son Shapur I (241–272) continued the expansion of the empire.

Invading Roman Mesopotamia, Shapur I captured Carrhae and Nisibis, but in 243 the Roman general Timesitheus defeated the Persians at Rhesaina and regained the lost territories. The emperor Gordian III's (238–244) subsequent advance down the Euphrates was defeated at Meshike (244), leading to Gordian's murder by his own troops and enabling Shapur to conclude a highly advantageous peace treaty with the new emperor Philip the Arab (244–249), by which he secured the immediate payment of 500,000 denari.

Shapur soon resumed the war, defeating the Romans at Barbalissos (252), overrunning Syria and sacking Antioch (253 or 256). Roman counter-attacks under the emperor Valerian (253–260) ended in disaster, when the Roman army was defeated and besieged at Edessa, and Valerian was captured by Shapur at a peace conference, remaining Shapur's prisoner for the rest of his life.

Shapur I celebrated his victory and the unprecedented achievement of capturing a Roman emperor by carving the impressive rock reliefs in Naqsh-e Rostam and Bishapur.

[see Link](#)



The Sassanid Empire, 226 A.D. to 651 A.D. This, the third Iranian Empire, before the Arab conquest of Iran, considered itself the heirs to the Achaemenids, with its heroic kings Ardashir I, Shapur I and Shapur II and Khusrau I Anoshirvan (of the Immortal Soul) and many others, who for four centuries ruled over vast regions of present day Iran, Iraq, eastern Turkey (and for a short time the whole of Turkey), the eastern coast of the Arabian peninsula, western India, and regions of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. (see map.)

The constant rivalry with Rome also had a positive side (!!!), in that the Romans whilst sending letters to the Sassanian kings, addressed them as 'brothers' an 'acknowledgement' reserved only for this political neighbour. And, even less known are the several marriage alliances between Rome and Persia!! The grandmother of the last ill-fated king, Yezdegird III, was Miriam, daughter of the Byzantium Emperor Maurice.

But these incessant rivalry and wars exhausted both empires, the Romans/the Byzantines, and the Persians were finally eclipsed by the new Arabs.

In its best time, the Sassanians defeated the Roman Emperor Gordian III, captured another, Valerian, and negotiated terms with another Emperor, Philip, extracting a huge sum of 500,000 dinare; later its conquering armies went all the way to Jerusalem. China, and the kingdoms of South-east Asia sent embassies, and a now little known innovation by them, seven sail vessels, sailed around the Indo-China coast to China.



Khusru I (Chosroes) hunting, silver gilded bowl.

In later times, royal hunts were accompanied with a huge retinue of cavalry and elephants, the ladies and courtesans went along living in rich tents and with musicians, female harpists, following!!!

Their cultural influence extended far beyond the empire's territorial borders, reaching as far as Western Europe, Africa, China and India and played a prominent role in the formation of both European and Asiatic medieval art.

This influence carried forward to the early Islamic world. The dynasty's unique, aristocratic culture transformed the Islamic conquest of Iran into a Persian renaissance. Much of what later became known as Islamic culture, architecture, writing and other skills were borrowed mainly from the Sassanid Persians and propagated throughout the broader Muslim world.

The backbone of the Persian army (Spah) in the Sassanid era was composed of two types of heavy cavalry units: Clibanarii and Cataphracts. This cavalry force, composed of elite noblemen trained since youth for military service, was supported by light cavalry, infantry, and archers. Sassanid tactics centered around disrupting the enemy with archers, war elephants, and other troops, thus opening up gaps the cavalry forces could exploit.

Unlike their predecessors, the Parthians, the Sassanids developed advanced siege engines. This development served the empire well in conflicts with Rome, in which success hinged upon the ability to seize cities and other fortified points; conversely, the Sassanids also developed a number of techniques for defending their own cities from attack. The Sassanid army was famous for its heavy cavalry, which was much like the preceding Parthian army, albeit only some of the Sassanid heavy cavalry were equipped with lances. The Greek historian Ammianus Marcellinus's description of Shapur II's clibanarii cavalry manifestly shows how heavily equipped it was, and how only a portion were spear equipped:

All the companies were clad in iron, and all parts of their bodies were covered with thick plates, so fitted that the stiff-joints conformed with those of their limbs; and the forms of human faces were so skillfully fitted to their heads, that since their entire body was covered with metal, arrows that fell upon them could lodge only where they could see a little through tiny openings opposite the pupil of the eye, or where through the tip of their nose they were able to get a little breath. Of these some who were armed with pikes, stood so motionless that you would have thought them held fast by clamps of bronze.

Commercially, land and sea trade with China was important to both the Sassanid and Chinese Empires. Large numbers of Sassanid coins have been found in southern China, confirming maritime trade.

On different occasions Sassanid kings sent their most talented Persian musicians and dancers to the Chinese imperial court at Luoyang during the Jin and Northern Wei dynasties and to Chang'an during the Sui and Tang dynasties. Both empires benefited from trade along the Silk Road, and shared a common interest in preserving and protecting that trade. They cooperated in guarding the trade routes through central Asia, and both built outposts in border areas to keep caravans safe from nomadic tribes and bandits.

Persia and northwestern India engaged in cultural as well as political intercourse during this period, as certain Sassanid practices spread into the Kushan territories. In particular, the Kushans were influenced by the Sassanid conception of kingship, which spread through the trade of Sassanid silverware and textiles depicting emperors hunting or dispensing justice.

Persians imported chess from India and changed the game's name from chaturanga to chatrang. In exchange, Persians introduced Backgammon to India.

Iranian ships with up to seven sails carrying as many as 700 seamen and "a thousand metric tons of cargo" were plying in the Indian Ocean in the direction of sea routes further East. Vietnam was a major trade destination for the Iranian ships and many of their merchants were established in the ports of Nam Viet, as there was extensive intercourse between Sasanid Iran and Vietnam as late as the Chinese Tang era when Iranian merchants established settlements in Canton and other Chinese ports as well.

Khusrau Parvez, Anushirwan, attracted numerous scholars and artisans to his court whose splendor and luxury "were unsurpassed by that of any dynasty in the world's history". Anushirwan promoted the establishment of universities, where scholars from India, Greece and Asia Minor indulged in various studies on medicine, agriculture and sciences.

Much of what later became known as Muslim culture, including architecture and writing, was originally drawn from Persian culture. At its peak the Sassanid Empire stretched from Syria to northwest India, but its influence was felt far beyond these political boundaries. Sassanid motifs found their way into the art of Central Asia and China, the Byzantine Empire, and even Merovingian France. Islamic art however, was the true heir to Sassanid art, whose concepts it was to assimilate while, at the same time instilling fresh life and renewed vigor into it. According to Will Durant:

"Sasanian art exported its forms and motifs eastward into India, Turkestan, and China, westward into Syria, Asia Minor, Constantinople, the Balkans, Egypt, and Spain. Probably its influence helped to change the emphasis in Greek art from classic representation to Byzantine ornament, and in Latin Christian art from wooden ceilings to brick or stone vaults and domes and buttressed walls."



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Shapur II, the Great, Sassanid king. The lower portion of the crown would be common design for later European crowns.



this crown, certainly inspired by animal horns, and antlers, but imposing, probably worn when riding in public and during hunting forays.





Sassanid lady, in floor mosaic, Bishapoor.



Lower portion of rock relief, a Sassanid "knight" and his horse, clad in full armour.

Roman Emperor, Philip, kneeling before Shapur I, notice the cherubic angel hovering above, not unlike an angel in Christian art.



relief at Bishapur.

Sassanid soldiers, in rock

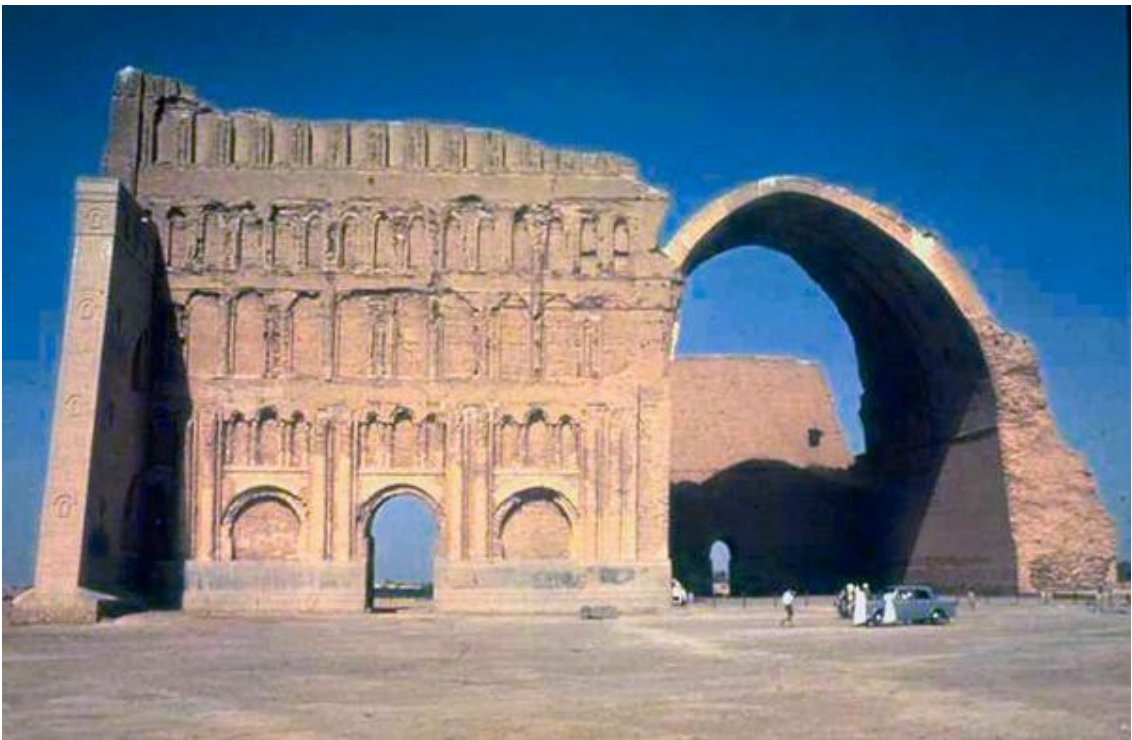


silver gilded from Sassanid finds in Kerman, housed in the Louvre.





reconstruction of a Sassanid cavalry soldier approaching Ctesiphon, capital of the Sassanids, (Ctesiphon is near modern Baghdad); only the central arch remains, the whole enclosed city and walls were successively destroyed by invading Arabs, and later the Mongols and then Timurlane.



the remains of Ctesiphon, capital of the Sassanids, the great central arch size can be judged by the people and vehicle in front. My placemark is over this arch of Ctesiphon.



Ardashir I , founder of the Sassanid Empire.



Shapur I (Shahpbur),





modern Persian artist depicting Parthian/by default also Sassanid Cavalry!!!

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